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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a language skills program for fourth and fifth grade students, based on community involvement through the use of a camera. It asserts that, in photography, a child works with the same kinds of abstractions as those basic to language development--analysis, comparison, classification, definition, and narration--but is not frustrated by limited verbal ability, undeveloped vocabulary, or difficulty in writing. Community photography projects and related classroom activities for nine basic communication skills are described in detail. A table is included that measures six achievement-score changes in this study, according to community involvement and grade level. (MAI)

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A Child's-eye View

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A Child's-eye View

> One of the most obvious ways of providing conditions for creative learning is to offer a curriculum with plenty of opportunities for creative behavior. (E. Paul Torrance, Creativity in the Classroom, NEA: 1977, 24.)

When children use cameras to explore their surroundings, there are indeed "plenty of opportunities for creative behavior." Moreover, these opportunities increase when learning activities are not restricted to the time and space of the classroom. As a part of our community-centered curriculum for elementary students at P. K. Yonge Laboratory School, University of Florida, we encourage children to use cameras to study the richly stimulating environment of the community--its people, their occupations, and all that defines our community and makes it unique. For the children in this program the camera is a valuable tool for research and reporting, a tool with which to make meaning out of life, as well as "something fun."

Children in the community involvement program at P. K. Yonge participate in work and service experiences; they explore community history, culture and recreation, using photography to report on what they learn. Involved in practicalities, not confined to the schoolhouse, they become useful members of the community. They acquire language skills while using photographs to illustrate a biography of a local septagenarian. They learn math from being on-site where a house is going up or by comparison shopping for groceries to plan a luncheon for parents. Each student chooses a community work project, commensurate with his abilities.

Thus "book learning" combines with experiences in practice. Students assume the responsibility of citizenship, examining the issues and enjoying the rewards of community life. During the year, these students demonstrate outstanding academic growth. (See Table.) At the same time, they display an increasing awareness of the dependencies of community life and of the need for all members of a community to care for and help each other.

Six Instamatic cameras are stored in the classroom along with a supply of film and processing materials. The children borrow these cameras whenever they wish--when they go on field trips or to work-sites, decide on picture-taking projects or want to take pictures at home or at school. We use money from the classroom budget to buy film and darkroom supplies; usually we work with black and white film. The teacher prints most of the pictures, but interested students are trained to develop and print. Occasionally film is commercially processed.

Children are enthusiastic photographers. To many, a camera is not only an extension of the eye, it is a magic box, and as such is viewed as mysterious and remarkable. Even after they have learned how a camera works and how to take and print pictures, the feeling persists in them that the camera is magic. And because of the magic they want to continue using the camera to explore their environment. Children who photograph their friends, family members and the formative events of their lives practice looking closely at what is going on around them. Their skills of observation grow, and with them, the tendencies to perform the basic acts of human intellection--analysis, comparison, classification, definition, and narration. Their growing propensity to reflect in these ways results in more critical and creative thinking.

If, by the time a child is eight years old, he hasn't attained an

arbitrarily specified level of proficiency in reading and writing, he feels deficient. Instead of providing him with knowledge and power, the printed word frustrates him. Ultimately, unless there is effective intervention, he cannot cope at all with the printed word. Written language becomes an insurmountable barrier, separating him from a world of knowledge and experience that readers enjoy. He cannot understand and interpret what others have to say in writing, nor can he relay his own thoughts and feelings to others on a level commensurate with his thinking.

But even the child who has limited verbal ability, undeveloped vocabulary or difficulty with writing can use the camera to tell a story. Because he has discovered a means to communicate, he gains confidence. Buoyed by this confidence he feels comfortable risking encounters with words. A child who photographs to communicate ideas is not limited to "telling" with only the words he can read, write or spell at that moment; he tells his story with the myriad images the world offers, freely translating his complex perceptions, feelings and responses to others. The camera allows children to communicate with ease, even though they are working with the same kinds of abstractions which form the basis of language. The child who photographs composes each frame, classifies images, selects what to include and exclude. In order to classify, he must first define. If he wishes to tell a story pictorially, he must develop a sequence, a beginning, middle and end. He may have to interpret his pictures to others and answer questions. As he talks, about them, he builds language skills.

As they study their community they use photography:

1) *to build vocabulary,* using photographs for Concentration games, matching the picture with the word; using word cards or sentence cards to match with appropriate pictures in telling a story; photographing objects around the room or at home to display and label; illustrating unusual words with photographs that define them.

2) *to analyze,* the child takes pictures of people who fulfill specified descriptions--happy, sad, tall, short--and tells in in what way their faces or bodies fit the description; he photographs the growth stages of plants or animals in the room.

3) *to classify,* the child groups photographs according to their shared characteristics--"these are pictures of people, these are pictures of houses, these are pictures of places I'd like to go."

4) *to compare and contrast,* the child photographs buildings, their doors, windows, cupolas, gables, and defines features that set them apart from other buildings; compares old and new styles of architecture; photographs a building "going up", at intervals and discusses what was laid first, next, last; photographs the downtown area as it looks today and compares ours with old photos from the library; photographs the same elements (cemetery, square, churchyard, downtown) of three surrounding communities (Micanopy, McIntosh, and Cedar Key) and compare them.

5) *to interpret,* each child tells about someone elses pictures;

he summarizes a trip he did not go on, using the pictures taken by those who did; he tells about how a person in a photograph feels from the way he looks in the photograph; he tells what is happening in a photograph or what will happen next.

6) *to summarize*, each child accompanies his parents to their places of work and spends the day there, photographing and interviewing; he then prepares a photojournal about key features of the parent's occupation to share with the class; the child takes pictures during a field trip, puts them in sequential order and writes a story about the trip to accompany the pictures.

7) *to respond to the environment*, students make a photojournal for younger children about "how to ride the bus;" they report on the effects of littering on campus; they record how the lunchroom looks when the class finishes lunch; they prepare a booklet for new students on "fun places to go in our community."

8) *to promote cooperative group work*, students prepare a slide/tape about a class project, such as dissecting the human brain with a visiting surgeon; students plan the reporting of a trip through pictures--who will take the pictures? who is responsible for the camera? how will we report on what we did?

9) *to build self-concept*, each child makes an *All About Me* book to tell his story; each child is featured as *Student of the Week*--his photograph is prominently displayed in the room along with a composite story written by the class which focuses on positive things about him, things that make him special.

When you put a camera in a child's hand, he becomes independent. No one has to spell his words for him or help him write. With a camera in his hand, he can compete on an equal basis and is fully as capable of communicating as the phenomenon who at six years of age can read on the sixth grade level.

TABLE

Means For Six Achievement Change Scores
By Community Involvement and By Grade

	Math Concepts	Math Computations	Math Applications	Spelling	Language	Social Science
High Involved Students	1.489	0.767	1.233	1.350	2.562	0.900
Low Involved Students	0.929	0.676	1.117	1.029	0.900	0.559
Fourth Graders	1.264	1.082	1.325	1.108	1.250	0.730
Fifth Graders	1.020	0.433	1.020	1.154	1.658	0.627
High Involved 4 Graders	1.650	-0.050	0.800	2.550	3.300	1.400
Low Involved 4 Graders	1.178	1.333	1.430	0.820	0.840	0.656
High Involved 5 Graders	1.443	1.000	1.357	0.950	2.317	0.829
Low Involved 5 Graders	0.650	-0.063	0.725	1.329	1.000	0.450
Overall	1.123	0.708	1.156	1.132	1.454	0.668